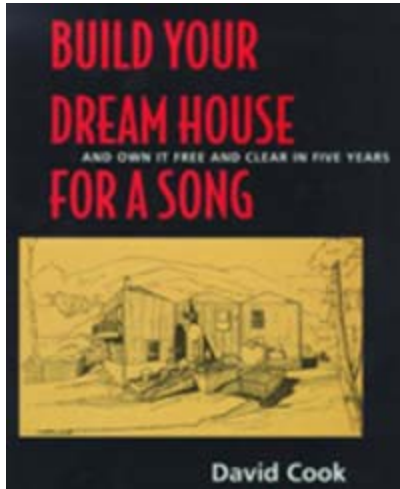


## MoreShelter!

July 06, 2008

### Build Your Dream House For A Song (Or For Pretty Darn Cheap)



Something inside David Cook has driven him to build homes- he didn't want to be a slave to a thirty-year mortgage! In the 1970s, he fixed up many homes in the East Bay and even built one from scratch in El Cerrito with the help of a general contractor.

Then, a few years later, he found raw land property in the Sleepy Hollow section of San Anselmo to develop. David, a Marin resident, has written the book entitled "Build Your Dream House For a Song" (And Own It Free And Clear In Five Years).

Most homes are built using 2 by 4's, but this was too easy for David who was looking for a challenge- hence, steel.

David started attending auctions for building materials. He first found a very large truck for \$900 which enabled him to carry the goods and materials he found. Next, David found a backhoe for \$5,000 so he could off-load the truck (after he finished the house, he was able to re-sell the backhoe for the \$5,000 purchase price!) After that, he got working on his steel building.

David put a sign at the UC Berkeley School of Architecture to find an architectural student to design his steel structure. Most young students were overwhelmed by the scope of the project, but not Guillermo Marin, a native of Mexico, who was applying for a professor position and knew exactly what to do with the steel structure. David apologized to Guillermo for only being able to pay him \$1,000 for the project, but Guillermo was not disappointed because it provided an opportunity for him to learn our building codes. As an FYI, David pointed out that the building codes were designed for health and safety.



Plan approval and design review took several months. A structural engineer was also hired because of the steel.



The Sleepy Hollow home was located 270 feet from the street and David decided to place all utilities underground; not a problem because he had the backhoe. He brought utilities (electrical, water and telephone) onto the property prior to building, so that he and his family could live comfortably and rent free in a temporary dwelling (a mobile home which David bought for \$3,000). It then took him two years to build his dream house on the property. A key point David makes, is to get financing from the seller on the property while working on the project.

David used primarily salvaged materials and free stuff, recycled windows and solid core commercial quality doors purchased at auction for \$10 each. The best is the flooring that came from Rincon Annex Post Office on Mission Street in the Financial District- one-inch thick by two-and-a-quarter-inch wide maple. The good old US government got the one-inch stuff while he was thrilled with 5/8"! The HVAC (heating and air conditioning) came from an old building in SF that was being demolished. David built the structure for \$40 per square foot, including labor and materials, but not including the land. These are 1988 prices, but David feels there has been a very minor increase (5%) in materials; however labor costs have increased significantly. In the end, you can save a minimum of 30% when taking charge of building your own home.

CNN recently reported that builders are getting back to basics by building smaller homes, but David would like us to consider getting truly back to basics and actually build our own homes.

The net-net? The American dream is still within reach...you just need to put some sweat equity into your design!

#### Details-



To reach David Cook, or buy a copy of his book, go to his [website](#).

Posted by Rita Richcreek at 03:49 PM in [RiShelter](#) | [Permalink](#)

#### Comments

I give him credit for being thrifty, but what always gets overlooked is your own time. I know mine is worth at least \$50/hr, and I can't just quit my job to go build a house.

I'm sure steel is up more than 5% since 1988.

And I hate to be catty, but the house isn't exactly an architectural gem either.

Posted by: [Ian](#) | [July 09, 2008 at 08:21 AM](#)

Probably 1 in 100 people can survive by using other people's refuse. If we all tried this, most of us would not be able to find the used HVAC, flooring, etc because it would be snatched up by everyone else. Besides, I have a better idea on how to save \$\$ on buying a house: Just wait a few years. Houses in Marin will be selling for 50 cents on the dollar by 2011-2012.

Posted by: [Big V](#) | [July 09, 2008 at 01:47 PM](#)

As stated in the writing the biggest cost is the time, and there is no mention what so ever on how many man hours were used building this house nor the total time elapsed.

Just a slight comment on "These are 1988 prices, but David feels there has been a very minor increase (5%) in materials..." Steel has risen over 200% since 2000, wood more pipes etc more as well... Used usable trucks and backhoes as well...

I did not bother to look at 1988 prices since the 5% version was off by a factor of 40 at year 2000.

Still man hours most probably have gone up more than materials, so please give us the total man hours spent and total months between start and finish when no other job was done.

Posted by: Lacking info | [July 09, 2008 at 05:22 PM](#)

No self respecting American is willing to invest the time and labor to do this type of (honest & hard) work. This country is full of folks who like to shuffle paper around call it some fancy names and fleece the hardworking folks around the world.

Posted by: Google Millionaire | [July 11, 2008 at 07:48 PM](#)

Yes, it is an unfortunate sad fact. It can be an incredibly rewarding experience. Thanks for your comment.

Posted by: [David N. Cook](#) | [July 13, 2008 at 11:44 AM](#)